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Inside Washington

Cranston Harasses Reagan's ACTION Nominee

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When President Reagan named Dallas attorney Tom Pauken to head ACTION—the umbrella agency which oversees the Peace Corps and VISTA—it appeared unlikely that he would face opposition.

Pauken, 37, seemed well qualified: B.A. from Georgetown University, law degree from Southern Methodist University; Vietnam veteran. House and Senate aide. Associate director of the White House Fellows program. Practicing attorney. Congressional candidate, twice a narrow loser in his Dallas district.

At first there was no opposition. Pauken sailed through hearings of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, winning unanimous approval from a panel whose Democratic members include Teddy Kennedy (Mass.), Don Riegle (Mich.), Harrison Williams (N.J.) and Howard Metzenbaum (Ohio).

Then Senate Minority Whip Alan Cranston (D.-Calif.) took an active interest in the case. Two months earlier, it seems certain, Cranston had never heard the name Pauken. Now he was lining up opposition.

There was one issue: Pauken had been an Army intelligence officer 12 years ago during his 11-month stint in Vietnam. That, asserted Cranston, disqualified him from the ACTION post. Appointment of a former intelligence officer, he argued, "endangers the lives of Peace Corps volunteers and staff serving abroad."

Cranston, the seventh-ranking (of eight) Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, demanded hearings to investigate Pauken's intelligence connection. Chairman Charles Percy (R.-Ill.) quickly agreed.

Why was Cranston so obsessed with the Pauken nomination? The answer lies with Jonathan R. Steinberg, Cranston's closest aide who does not even serve on the Foreign Relations staff. Instead, Steinberg is minority counsel of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, where Cranston is ranking member.

A liberal ideologue, Steinberg never served in the military. He did, however, serve as Peace Corps deputy general counsel at the very time Pauken was in Vietnam. It was Steinberg who mobilized Cranston into operation. As *Fortune* magazine noted in a 1979 article that described Steinberg's hold over the senator: "Steinberg's whispered words are often repeated by Cranston as if he were a ventriloquist's dummy."

And when Pauken appeared for testimony before the Foreign Relations panel last week, Cranston was once again Steinberg's dummy.

"How did you happen to go into military intelligence?" Cranston demanded.

"I volunteered for United States Army service during the Vietnam conflict and that is where I was assigned after basic training," Pauken replied.

"Have you ever visited the CIA headquarters or had any connection with the CIA?" Cranston demanded.

Pauken explained that as director of the White House Fellows program, "we visited just about every agency in the federal government," and that once, he and his colleagues had visited the CIA offices. Other than that, he had had no contact with the CIA.

"Did you participate in the interrogation of any North Vietnamese?" Cranston wanted to know.

"No."

"Or Vietcong soldiers?"

"No."

"Or civilians?"

Pauken explained that one of his responsibilities was to analyze the Hoa-Hao, a Buddhist sect that was influential in Vietnam's delta. In that capacity, he did interview some members of the group.

What did you do with the information? Cranston demanded.

"I sent it to [the Army's] Strategic Research and Analysis [office] in Saigon."

Over and over, Cranston sought to link Pauken with the dreaded CIA. "You were in no way involved with the CIA in operations in Vietnam?" he asked. "Did you knowingly communicate with any CIA personnel while you were there?"

And over and over, Pauken testified that he had not worked for the agency. When Cranston discovered in Pauken's file a commendation, he pounced:

"Would you explain, then, the citation of the Joint Service Commendation Medal that you were awarded, stating that your analyses provided the Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, the United States Embassy, and other agencies throughout the intelligence community with intelligence information of great value in the counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam?"

Pauken: "I authored a major report on Truong

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who was head of SRA at that time, was most appreciative of that report. They passed it on to other agencies—so what?"

Cranston had no answer.

To Sen. Orrin Hatch (R.-Utah), Cranston's opposition was incredible. "When many of his peers chose to demonstrate against the policies of our government, when many of his peers left our country for other lands rather than serve in our armed forces, Tom Pauken volunteered and served his country honorably and well."

To oppose Pauken because he enlisted in the Army, was assigned to Vietnam and risked his life as an Army intelligence officer, Hatch argued, would be outrageous.

Not everyone on the committee agreed. Last week Cranston convinced five fellow Democrats—Pell (R.I.), Biden (Del.), Sarbanes (Md.), Tsongas (Mass.) and Dodd (Conn.) to join him in voting against Pauken. Somehow, he also persuaded Republican Rudy Boschwitz (Minn.) to go along.

Only when two Democrats—John Glenn (Ohio) and Edward Zorinsky (Neb.)—broke with Cranston was Pauken able to squeak through the committee, 10 to 7.

The Pauken nomination now goes to the Senate floor where confirmation is likely. But Cranston will not give up. He has served notice that if Pauken is approved, he will introduce legislation removing the Peace Corps from ACTION. And all because the President had the temerity to appoint to a significant post a man who committed the cardinal sin of serving his country honorably in Vietnam.